

A SECURE METHOD OF EXCHANGING INFORMATION MESSAGES

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the invention

The invention relates to a secure method of
5 exchanging information messages sent successively, at
given time intervals, from a sending platform to a
receiving platform. The invention relates more
particularly to a method which ensures that the last
message picked up by the receiving platform corresponds
10 to the last message sent by the sending platform.

Description of the prior art

The method according to the invention finds one
application in train control and/or supervision systems,
which are known in France as control, operation and
15 maintenance aid systems (SACEM) and include a centralized
control station, fixed installations along the tracks,
and a control unit in each train. In control systems of
this kind, the centralized control station sends the
fixed installations at regular time intervals information
20 messages including information relating to traffic
conditions on one or more track sections downstream of
the fixed installation. The control unit of any train in
the network then receives from the fixed installations
the last information message received by the fixed
25 installation and deduces therefrom the running speed to
adopt. When exchanging information messages of the above
kind it is essential, for safety reasons, to be sure that
the last message received by the fixed installations
corresponds to the last information message sent by the
30 centralized control station. Given the various components
involved in transmitting messages, and the fact that
there may be relatively great distances between the
centralized control station and the fixed installations,
it is possible for some messages to suffer interference
35 or to be delayed during transmission and to reach the

fixed installations late, so modifying the order in which the fixed installation receives the information messages compared to the order in which they are sent by the centralized control station. In this case the updated
5 information message at the fixed installation no longer corresponds to the last message sent by the centralized control station. Although such phenomena are rare, to ensure traffic safety it is absolutely essential that they are detected.

10 A standard way to make the transmission of information messages secure is to employ continuous bidirectional exchanges of data so that an information message received by a fixed installation is sent back to the centralized control station, which checks that it
15 corresponds to the information message sent. However, methods of this kind relying on bidirectional exchanges of data use complex processing methods necessitating costly systems at the sender and the receiver.

The object of the present invention is therefore to
20 propose a secure method of exchanging information messages which, in the course of successive unidirectional exchanges of information messages between a sending platform and a receiving platform, ensures that the last message picked up by the receiving platform
25 corresponds to the last message sent by the sending platform, in order to be able to validate correct updating of the information message at the receiving platform.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

30 To this end, the invention provides a secure method of exchanging information messages sent successively from a sending platform to a receiving platform which includes:

a) an initialization sequence in which an
35 initialization message containing information relating to

a date t_1 for sending a first information message M_1 is exchanged between the sending platform and the receiving platform so that the sending platform and the receiving platform then both know the date t_1 for sending the first
5 information message M_1 , and

b) an information message transmission sequence in which:

- the information messages are sent successively by the sending platform at given time intervals ΔT_e with a
10 sending time tolerance δ ($\delta < \Delta T_e$) based on a clock specific to the sending platform, so that the first message M_1 is sent at the date t_1 on the clock and the n th message M_n is sent at the date $t_n = t_1 + (n-1) \cdot \Delta T_e + \delta$, each message M_n being coded by means of a dynamic code C_n
15 specific to the date t_n of sending the message (the information message data is advantageously coded using a code defined as a function of the security criteria of the application, so that the information messages are rendered incomprehensible in the event of a transmission
20 error, for example the SACEM code), and

- the messages received by the receiving platform are processed as a function of their reception date t_r based on a clock specific to the receiving platform so that the messages received in an observation
25 window F_n in the vicinity of t_n are decoded using a decoding sequence DC_n adapted to decode the dynamic code C_n , the clock of the receiving platform being synchronized to the date t_1 on receiving the first message M_1 .

Particular embodiments of the method according to
30 the invention can include one or more of the following features, individually or in any technically feasible combination:

- during the initialization sequence a) a coded initialization message M_0 is sent from the sending
35 platform to the receiving platform and a coded

initialization message M'_0 is sent from the receiving platform to the sending platform, the initialization messages M_0 , M'_0 containing the information relating to the date t_1 for sending the first information message M_1 ,
5 and the initialization messages M_0 , M'_0 being decoded by the sending platform and the receiving platform which then know the date t_1 for sending the first information message M_1 ;

- if the first message M_1 is not received within an
10 allotted time after reception of the initialization message, the clock of the sending platform is automatically synchronized to the date t_1 at the moment corresponding to the end of the allotted time;
- the observation window F_n corresponds to a time
15 window $[t_1 + (n-1) \cdot \Delta T_g - \Delta T_f \cdot \varepsilon, t_1 + (n-1) \cdot \Delta T_g + \Delta T_f \cdot (1-\varepsilon)]$, where n is an integer, ΔT_f corresponds to the width of the observation window and satisfies the equation $\Delta T_f \leq \Delta T_g$ and ε is from 0 to 1;
- a clock synchronization signal is sent regularly
20 by the sending platform between sending messages M_n , the synchronization signal being used to correct the frequency or the phase of the internal clock of the receiving platform dynamically in order to reduce the phase or frequency error between the internal clocks of
25 the receiving platform and the sending platform;
- the information messages decoded by the receiving platform are transmitted to an information processing module;
- the messages received by the receiving platform
30 during an observation window F_n are stored sequentially in a memory able to store only one message at a time and only the message stored in the memory at the end of the observation window F_n is transmitted to the information processing module; and
- the sending platform is part of a centralized
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control station of a rail traffic supervision and control system, the receiving platform is part of a fixed installation disposed alongside a rail track, and the information processing module is a control unit on board
5 a train circulating on a track section associated with the fixed installation.

Objects, aspects and advantages of the present invention will be better understood from the following description of one particular embodiment of the
10 invention, which is offered by way of non-limiting example and refers to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a partial diagrammatic representation of a train supervision installation employing a secure
15 method in accordance with the invention of exchanging information messages.

Figure 2 is a flowchart showing the main steps of a sending method conforming to the secure exchange method according to the invention employed by a sending
20 platform.

Figure 3 is a flowchart showing the main steps of a processing method conforming to the secure exchange method according to the invention employed by a receiving platform.

25 Figure 4 is a timing diagram showing the sending of information messages from the sending platform, the reception of the messages at the receiving platform, and the processing of the messages in conformance with the secure exchange method according to the invention.

30 To clarify the drawings, only the system components necessary for understanding the invention are shown. The same components carry the same reference numbers if shown in more than one figure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

35 Figure 1 shows diagrammatically a centralized

control station 1 communicating to fixed installations 2 disposed alongside a rail track section information messages including information relating to traffic conditions on one or more track sections downstream of the fixed installation 2. The messages are then transmitted, in a manner that is known in the art, from the fixed installations 2 via a track circuit to a train 5 which carries a control unit 6 which uses the information messages to determine, among other things, how to proceed, for example the speed to adopt or if it is necessary to initiate an emergency stop.

For transmitting the information messages, the centralized control station 1 includes a sending platform 10 connected by transmission cables 4 to a receiving platform 20 in the fixed installation 2. The sending platform 10 and the receiving platform 20 each have an internal clock.

The sequence of information messages sent by the sending platform 10 using the secure exchange method according to the invention is described next with reference to figure 2.

In that figure, in a first step 101 of the secure exchange method, an initialization sequence is executed during which a coded initialization message M_0 is transmitted from the sending platform 10 to the receiving platform 20. The message M_0 contains a portion of the information of the initial date of the first information message, for example a random number, generated by the sending platform. In a second step 102, the sending platform receives the message M'_0 sent by the receiving platform. The message M'_0 contains a portion of the information of the initial date of the first information message, for example a random number, generated by the receiving platform. In a step 103 the sending platform 10 decodes the messages M_0 , M'_0 to generate the initial date

of the first message. An implicit portion can optionally complement the initial date.

The transmission of the initialization sequence is conventionally made secure by executing a bidirectional
5 exchange method to check that the correlation between the received message and the sent message is correct.

The initialization sequence previously described is followed by a step 104 of the method in which no message is sent by the sending platform 10 until the time t_e on
10 the internal clock of the sending platform 10 reaches the date t_1 for sending the first message M_1 . At that date t_1 , the sending platform 10 sends the first message M_1 , after which messages are sent at constant time intervals ΔT_e such that the n th message M_n is sent at the date
15 $t_n = t_1 + (n-1) \cdot \Delta T_e + \delta$, where n is an integer and δ is the sending time tolerance ($\delta < \Delta T_e$).

According to one feature of the invention, each message M_n sent is coded with a dynamic code C_n specific to the date t_n for sending the message. The dynamic code C_n
20 is of a type chosen from dynamic codes known in the art which have coding properties such that the decoding of the message M_n using a decoding sequence other than the decoding sequence DC_n for decoding the code C_n produces a message that is incomprehensible given the coding defined
25 at the level of the application. For example, the code chosen can be a superimposed pseudo-random sequence based on applying to each of the data bits the primitive polynomial $X^{32} + X^{22} + X^2 + X + 1$.

The processing executed in parallel by the
30 receiving platform 20 while the sending platform 10 is sending the sequence of information messages is described next with reference to figure 3.

As shown in figure 3, in a first step 201 of the method, the receiving platform 20 receives the message M_0
35 contained in the initialization sequence sent by the

sending platform during the step 101. In a second step 202, the receiving platform 20 sends the message M'_0 , which is received by the sending platform during the step 102. In a step 203, the messages M_0 , M'_0 are decoded by the
5 receiving platform 20 to obtain the initial date t_1 of the first message M_1 , as in step 103 of the method as executed at the sending platform.

In a subsequent step 204 of the method, which is triggered when the receiving platform 20 receives the
10 first message M_1 , the internal clock of the receiving platform 20 is synchronized to the date t_1 so that $t_r = t_1$ at the time the first message M_1 is received, where t_r is the time on the internal clock of the receiving platform 20. The internal clock of the receiving platform 20 is
15 synchronized by default to the date t_1 if the first message M_1 does not reach the receiving platform 20 within an allotted time after reception of the initialization message M_0 .

After the message M_1 is received, the clock of the
20 receiving platform 20 is preferably synchronized regularly to the clock of the sending platform 10 using clock synchronization frames sent regularly by the sending platform 10 in the same cycle as the messages M_n . These frames are either dedicated frames or the messages
25 M_n themselves. Accordingly, if a synchronization error (phase, frequency, average, least squares, etc.) is measured between the internal clock of the sending platform 10 and the internal clock of the receiving platform 20, the frequency or the phase of the internal
30 clock of the receiving platform 20 is corrected dynamically to reduce the phase or frequency error between the two clocks.

During the next step 205 of the method, the first message M_1 received is decoded by means of a decoding
35 sequence DC_1 adapted to decode the dynamic code C_1 and the

result of decoding the message M_1 is transmitted to the track circuit by the receiving platform 20.

The next step 206 of the method is triggered iteratively when the receiving platform 20 receives a new message M_r , a priori the message M_n , at a time t_r in an observation time window F_n that corresponds to a time window $[t_1+(n-1).\Delta T_e - \Delta T_f*\epsilon, t_1+(n-1).\Delta T_e + \Delta T_f*(1-\epsilon)]$, where ΔT_f is the width of the observation window, n is an integer and ϵ is from 0 to 1.

During the next step 207 of the method, the message M_r received from the sending platform 20 in an observation window F_n is decoded using a decoding sequence DC_n allotted to the observation window F_n which corresponds to the inverse coding sequence DC_n and is adapted to decode only the dynamic code C_n of the n th message sent by the sending platform 10.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, in a step that is not shown in figure 3, the message M_r decoded by the receiving platform 20 is then stored temporarily in a memory having a capacity such that it is able to store only one message at a time, before being sent to the track circuit at the time t_r corresponding to the end of the observation window F_n . In a simplified variant, the message M_r can be transmitted to the track circuit immediately at the end of the step 207, without being stored in a memory.

The train 5 on the track section then receives, via the track circuit, the messages decoded by the receiving platform 20, with the assurance that the messages M_r received, which are comprehensible given the decoding defined in the application, are correctly updated messages M_n , the information in which must be acted on. Moreover, to ensure the safety of trains circulating on the track, the control unit 6 on board the train 5 triggers an emergency stop if the train 5 receives a

plurality of successive incomprehensible messages, for example five such messages one after the other, with a result that the train is stopped when it no longer has sufficient information on traffic conditions in the downstream track section.

Figure 4 shows one example of a sequence of information messages exchanging in conformance with a method according to the invention. In this figure, the sending of messages M_1 to M_6 is shown on the top axis t_e , this axis corresponding to the time on the internal clock of the sending platform 10, and the reception of messages is shown on the axis t_r corresponding to the time on the clock of the receiving platform 20. In the example described with reference to Figure 4, the initialization sequence, not shown in this figure, is considered to be initiated at the time $t_e = 4h59min$ and the date t_1 of sending the first message is considered to be $t_1 = 5h$. The interval ΔT_e is of the order of a few milliseconds, for example $\Delta T_e = 50$ ms, with the result that the updating of the information messages is regular. In the example shown, the sending time tolerance δ is zero and the observation windows F_n have the characteristics $\varepsilon = 0.5$ and $\Delta T_r = 25$ ms.

Accordingly, referring to figure 4, and in particular to the reception of messages shown on the bottom axis t_r representing the time on the clock of the receiving platform 20, a few moments after the first message M_1 is sent the receiving platform 20 receives the message M_1 . The receiving platform 20 then synchronizes its internal clock so that $t_r = t_1$ at the moment the message M_1 is received. The message M_1 is then decoded by the receiving platform using the decoding sequence DC_1 and is then transmitted to the track circuit and thus to any train 5 on the track section.

A few moments later, the receiving platform 20

receives the message M_2 in an observation window F_2 of width ΔT_f centered on t_2 . The receiving platform 20 then decodes the message M_2 using the decoding sequence DC_2 . The decoded message is stored in a memory of the receiving platform having a capacity able to store only one message at a time and is then transmitted to the track circuit at the time t_r corresponding to the end of the observation window F_2 : $t_r = t_2 + \Delta T_f / 2$. The control unit 6 of the train 5 on the track section is then informed of traffic conditions by the message M_2 .

Because of interference affecting the transmission of the message M_3 , the receiving platform 20 does not receive any message during the observation window F_3 . In this case, the message transmitted by the receiving platform 20 to the track circuit at the time t_r corresponding to the end of the observation window F_3 is incomprehensible when decoded by the application, which informs the control unit 6 of the train 5 on the track section of this information message updating error.

In due course the message M_3 is received in the observation window F_4 and is then decoded using the decoding sequence DC_4 allotted to the window F_4 , which produces a decoded message that is incomprehensible, given the coding defined by the application and stored in the memory of the receiving platform 20. The incomprehensible message is transmitted to the track circuit at a time t_r corresponding to the end of the observation window F_4 and the control unit 6 of the train 5 receives the incomprehensible message and interprets it as another information message updating error. The control unit 6 then registers two successive information message updating errors, but does not yet bring about emergency stopping of the train if the allowed tolerance is five successive errors.

Two messages M_4 and M_5 are received successively by

the receiving platform 20 during an observation window F_5 . The receiving platform 20 receives the message M_4 first and then the message M_5 in the same observation window F_5 . The receiving platform decodes the message M_5 using the
5 decoding sequence DC_5 , producing a decoded message that is comprehensible, given the coding defined by the application and stored in the memory of the receiving platform 20 in place of the preceding message. The message M_5 is transmitted to the track circuit at a time
10 t_r corresponding to the end of the observation window F_5 . The control unit 6 of the train 5 then receives a message which is comprehensible, given the coding defined by the application, i.e. the message M_5 , with the assurance that the information contained in that message has been
15 updated correctly.

During an observation window F_6 , the receiving platform 20 receives the message M_6 , which is decoded using the decoding sequence DC_6 and then stored in the memory before it is sent to the track circuit at a time t_r
20 corresponding to the end of the window F_6 . The control unit 6 of the train 5 then receives a message that is comprehensible, given the coding defined by the application, i.e. the message M_6 , with the assurance that the information contained in the message has been
25 updated.

Thus, thanks to the regular unidirectional exchange of messages between a sending platform and a receiving platform, a secure method of exchanging information messages of the kind described above guarantees correct
30 updating of the information messages that reach the destination in a comprehensible form, without using complex processing. A method of the above kind has the advantage that it is relatively inexpensive to implement and transmits information at high speed, unlike the usual
35 bidirectional transmission systems, in which the

information verification sequence considerably slows the transmission of messages, and therefore action taken in response to them. The method according to the invention therefore refreshes information messages received by a
5 train at a relatively high rate.

Of course, the invention is in no way limited to the embodiment described and shown, which is offered by way of example only and can be modified, in particular from the point of view of the composition of the various
10 components or by substituting technical equivalents, without departing from the scope of protection of the invention.